WORKING DOGS - OWNERS NEED YOUR
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Be Aware of —

WORKING DOGS — OWNERS NEED YOUR COOPERATION

c. 2

By the members of Independence #2, the newly formed dog guide users group.

Both the cane and the dog guide have advantages and disadvantages.

The white cane user has more contact with his environment than the dog user. The cane is always in contact with the sidewalk and warns the blind person of obstacles in his path, whereas the dog leads his master around obstacles.

Josette Kernaghan with dog guide, Mark.

The team of dog and master can walk faster at a steadier rate because probing is eliminated.

Both the use of a white cane and a dog guide require intense concentration. However, the type required by each is different.

Though the dog user need not continuously probe for landmarks such as mailboxes or telephone poles as he walks down the street. His concentration must wholly be devoted to the activity of his dog. Through changes in the pressure that the dog exerts on the harness while guiding, its master can tell if the dog is walking straight ahead, going up or downstairs, and where staircases end. The master must be alert at all times for changes in this pressure on the harness. If the dog's attention strays from its work, the master must quickly act to restore the dog's attention, lest a hazard to its master go unnoticed.

The Public is sometimes inclined to think that dog guides are like machines which are programmed to take their masters to desired destinations on command. This is not so. The dog will only go where the master instructs it to go. The dog does not know if its master wants to go to a restaurant, store, or place of employment. The blind person must know his destination point because the dogs are not mind readers. However, they do have very good memories and they do remember different places that the master might visit consistently.

You may think that you are doing a good deed by helping a blind person and his dog across the street. This act will only confuse both master and dog as their concentration is on getting safely across. In most cases they know what they are doing and should be left alone. Constant interference can ruin the training of a dog guide or can cause a serious accident.

Never go on the left-hand side of the team and grasp the harness handle while the dog is trying to guide its master across the street. The harness handle is only to be used by the master. It will only create confusion for both parties if this is done. If the intersection is a particularly busy one and a difficult one for the team to cross, then the master may ask someone for assistance. If this is the case, the dog's master will drop the harness handle and will take the person's arm, heeling the dog across.

It is also assumed by many people that dog guides can let their masters know when to cross the street. This is not true. The dog will only go when the command "forward" is given, and then, only if it is safe to cross. It has been proven that dogs are color blind and cannot read signs or tell when lights change.

Regarding the "super dog" image, people sometimes feel that the dog guide does almost everything for the blind person. They are remarkable creatures but the owner should get a lot more credit than he is receiving.

When a blind person and a dog guide board a bus, it is most helpful if the seat behind the driver is available. The dog can curl up virtually out of the way and the blind person can hear the driver call out the name of the street where he wants to get off. If the master is forced to sit further back in the bus, it is very difficult to get off quickly enough and the dog is often in the way of other passengers. It is not known who is legally responsible if a passenger trips over a dog guide and is injured, but in any case, it is a problem that should be avoided if at all possible.

Dog distractions are definitely a big problem to a working team, especially loose dogs. It is very distressful for a dog's master to have to resort to correcting when the fault mainly lies with the other animal. Again, the dog guide is "just a dog" and investigating another dog is a normal reaction.

Please try and consider other people and obey the leash laws of your community.

Children can also be a distraction. Parents should be encouraged to teach their youngsters not to touch or tease these animals while they are working.

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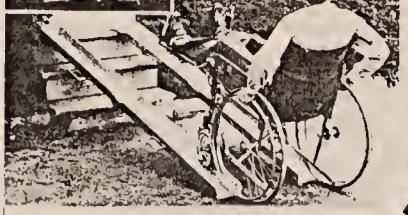

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Dogs — Continued from page 5

Dog guide owners are sometimes asked to go to schools and children's activity centres to give talks about their dogs. At such presentations, films from various guide dog training schools are often shown. It is encouraging to the dog's owner when the children ask questions. Children are by no means bashful and they are very open-minded.

All too often, many people pet dog guides while they are in harness without asking permission. This can be dangerous and too much of it can lead to the undoing of valuable training.

Some blind people feel that it is quite all right for the public to pet their dog guides while they are not working. There are some dog guide users, however, who are very concerned about the public petting and distracting their dogs too frequently. Yes, they are beautiful, but their masters' safety must also be considered.

Some dog guide users have noticed that when they have asked the public to please stop petting their dogs, that some people have been offended. It is hoped that this information will help you to realize that it is not always a good idea to pet a dog guide while working or otherwise. We are not snobbish people, and we encourage you to feel free to talk with us about our dogs, but the above points should be taken into consideration.

Leash corrections are sometimes necessary. This form of correcting is important because the dog needs to know that large distractions are not acceptable.

This correction is done by immediately dropping the harness handle, letting the leash go slack and then quickly giving it a forceful snap or jerk to regain the dog's attention. This does not hurt the dog's neck. It is not an act of cruelty but one of discipline like spanking a child. But after a short time, the dog is shown that it is still loved. The public is urged never to interfere with the team when this is being done or the dog will forget what it is being corrected for. If you insist upon interfering, the distractions can be fatal to all concerned. The animal's training will also suffer.

If a team is severely distracted, another way of getting the dog's attention off of the distraction is to make it sit and lie down on sharp command several times. This will hopefully regain the dog's attention. If not, the leash correction must be used.

Dog guides and their owners have occasionally been refused admittance to eating establishments. This is not a common problem but it still occurs. Most dog guide users find that non English speaking restaurant staff cause most of the friction. If a team does enter your restaurant, please be courteous enough to listen to what the master has to say concerning legislation. Most dog guide users will show some form of I.D. which should be carefully noted.

It is also illegal to deny a blind person and his dog the right to rent a room, apartment or house except in the case where any of the accommodation's amenities are shared with other tenants.

Frequently, restaurant management think that the dog will bite their customers and some think that the dog is a health hazard. These dogs are well looked after and are extremely clean. They are not known to bite as they are used to the public.

Surprisingly enough, the general public and various business people are not aware of the legislation which protects dog guide users in this Province. For more information, please contact your local human rights or government offices.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act was passesd in 1974, and the appropriate Sections concerning dog guides and their masters are: Section 2-C.-9, S.3., Section 3-C.-9, S.3., Section 8-C.-9, S.8.

Section 8 of the Blind Persons' Rights Act states that: "A person who contravenes a provision of this Act is guilty of an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding $200.00"

It is a definite no-no for the public to feed dog guides. These dogs are on specified diets and they are fed once or twice daily on a routine schedule. They are watered and relieved at certain times each day. If they gain too much weight, it could be hazardous to their health and their work.

In the past, there have been unfortunate cases of dog guides being poisoned. This is another reason why these valuable dogs should not be fed by the public.

When a blind person attends a dog guide school, he spends approximately four weeks training with that dog which has been specially chosen for him. During these four weeks, the trainee learns how to care for that dog. He is instructed how to feed, water, groom, clean the ears, and keep the harness and leash conditioned.

Obedience exercises are also part of the daily routine.

When the dog guide is out of harness, he is a great companion and pet for the blind master. The dogs enjoy romping, fetching a ball, bone, or other toy, playing tug-of-war, chewing on a delicious and well-earned treat, getting their tummies, ears, and chins rubbed and scratched, and just plain relaxing. The only time the dog is in harness, is when he is needed for duty. They look forward to their work, but they also enjoy off duty times too.

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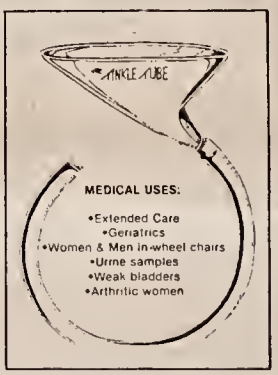

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